

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAMA 01377 141543Z

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ACTION SS-25

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R 141147Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC 3493

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 1377

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MASS, MARR, BA

SUBJECT : DISCUSSIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER OF BAHRAIN ON THE
FUTURE OF MIDEASTFOR

REF : STATE 226568

1. I MET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF BAHRAIN, SHAIKH KHALIFA BIN SALMAN AL KHALIFA, MORNING OF SEPT. 14. HE SAYS HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY IT TAKES SO LONG FOR FRIENDS TO DECIDE TO TALK WITH EACH OTHER, PARTICULARLY WHEN BAHRAINI NEEDS ARE SO "MODEST". HE NEVERTHELESS APPRECIATES THE HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION THAT THE QUESTION IS GETTING, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND HE SUGGESTS THAT HIGH-LEVEL USG POLICY MAKERS SHOULD NOT SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON THIS "VERY SMALL" QUESTION WHICH "CAN BE SO EASILY SETTLED" (ON KHALIFA'S TERMS, OF COURSE). HE AWAITS FURTHER WORD DURING HIS VISITS TO SINGAPORE, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND.

2. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT, I FIND, TO SUMMARIZE OR SYNTHESIZE THE CORE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONCERNS. I MENTIONED ALL THE POINTS SUGGESTED REFTEL, PARAS 3 AND 4. WHEN I ATTEMPTED TO DRAW OUT SHAIKH KHALIFA ON SPECIFICS OF WHAT HE HAD IN MIND REGARDING INCREASED USG COOPERATION WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN GOB AGREEMENT TO EXTENSION OF MIDDLE EAST FORCE'S USE OF FACILITY IN BAHRAIN, I GOT A DISJOINTED, FORCEFUL BUT HIGHLY EMOTIONAL, MONOLOGUE ON THE "ABSOLUTE ESSENTIALITY" OF "RESPECT", "DISCIPLINE", "INTERNAL SECURITY", "TOUGHNESS" ON THE PART OF THE GOB TOWARD ITS OWN CITIZENS AS WELL AS TOWARD NEIGHBORING STATES. BAHRAIN, ALTHOUGH
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MANAMA 01377 141543Z

OF MODEST INCOME, WAS NOT TO BECOME A "VASSAL" OF ANY OF ITS

NEIGHBORS, "NOT EVEN SAUDI ARABIA". IT WANTED A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USG, NOT CHANNELED THROUGH RIYADH, TEHRAN OR KUWAIT. USG MUST HELP BAHRAIN "MODERNIZE" ITS DEFENSE FORCE AND ITS POLICE AND MAYBE ITS COAST GUARD. EVERYONE IN THE REGION IS TRYING TO BUILD A FORT, KHALIFA NOTED. BAHRAIN DOESN'T WANT A FORT, BUT IT DOES NEED SOME PROTECTION. WHAT SPECIFICALLY DID HE HAVE IN MIND, I ASKED. SHAIKH HAMAD (HEIR APPARENT/MINISTER OF DEFENSE) HAS THE DETAILS, SAID KHALIFA. "I CARE ABOUT THE IMAGE, THE PRESTIGE, THE REPUTATION FOR FIRMNESS OF MY ADMINISTRATION. THE DETAILS CAN BE WORKED OUT WITH OTHERS. TALK WITH HAMAD WHEN HE GETS BACK FROM THE LONDON AIR SHOW."

3. "LOOK WHAT HAPPENED IN KUWAIT", HE WANDERED. "NO GOVERNMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD HAS EVER DONE MORE FOR ITS CITIZENS; BUT DID THEY RESPECT IT? NO. OUR COUSINS WERE LOSING CONTROL OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY, DESPITE ALL THEIR WEALTH AND SOPHISTICATION. ALL THEY DID WAS GIVE, GIVE, GIVE; THEY MUST BE TOUGH. THAT'S WHAT WE TOLD THEM. TAKE BOLD ACTION."

4. WHEN I TRIED TO FOCUS THE PRIME MINISTER'S ATTENTION ON THE FUTURE OF MIDEASTFOR, HE RESISTED. HE NEVER LINKED THE QUESTION OF THE 'HELP' HE IS SEEKING FROM THE USG WITH THE CONTINUING TENURE OF MIDEASTFOR IN BAHRAIN. HIS ONE COMMENT RE MIDEASTFOR WAS IN THE CONTEXT OF RELATING THAT BOTH THE SHAH OF IRAN AND KING OF SAUDI ARABIA

HAD PERSONALLY ADVISED HIM TO MAKE A DECISION REGARDING MIDEASTFOR ON THE GROUNDS OF BAHRAIN'S NATIONAL INTEREST; THAT HE COULD NOT AND SHOULD NOT EXPECT SUPPORT FROM THEM ON THE ISSUE. HE SAID THE SHAH ASKED IF "BAHRAIN WERE A VASSAL OF IRAN?" HE FELT HUMILIATED, HE SAID; BAHRAIN WOULD MAKE ITS OWN DECISION RE MIDEASTFOR, AS IT WAS A "FULLY INDEPENDENT NATION".

5. WHEN HE WAS THROUGH AND I GOT UP TO LEAVE, WISHING HIM A GOOD TRIP, KHALIFA SAID, "WOULD YOU RESPECT A POLICEMAN IN TATTERED CLOTHES?" I ASKED WHAT HE MEANT. "WOULD YOU RESPECT THE LAW, THE GOVERNMENT BEHIND A POLICEMAN WHO WAS IN RAGS? WE ARE IN RAGS -- IN THE DEFENSE FORCE, IN THE SECURITY FORCE. NO ONE CAN RESPECT US. WE MUST MODERNIZE."

6. COMMENT: I RELATE THE FOREGOING IN SEMI-MEMCON FORM TO ATTEMPT
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PAGE 03 MANAMA 01377 141543Z

TO CONVEY SOME OF THE FLAVOR OF THE MEETING. THIS WAS MY FIRST SUBSTANTIVE MEETING WITH THE MAN. HE DOES NOT PURSUE DIALOGUE; HE ASSERTS. THE MACHISMO ELEMENT WEIGHS HEAVILY ON HIS MIND; HE POUNDED THE COFFEE TABLE FOR EMPHASIS. IT WAS ALL A LITTLE BIZARRE, PARTICULARLY COMING FROM THIS LEAN, EXQUISITELY DRESSED (IN NON-TRADITIONAL, TIGHTLY-FASHIONED ROBE) AND DAPPER, REALLY ELEGANT, YOUNGISH PRIME MINISTER. MY OVERALL ASSESSMENT WOULD BE THAT HE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT BAHRAIN'S DECLINING PRESTIGE AMONGST

ITS NEIGHBORS; THAT HE SEES IT AS ESSENTIAL FOR BAHRAIN (AND HIS FAMILY, ALTHOUGH HE NEVER MENTIONED IT) FOR THE SAKE OF ITS IMAGE AND STATURE TO "GET MODERNIZED". THE YOUNG MEN IN THE BDF HAVE APPARENTLY GOT THEIR LIST OF ITEMS. JUST AS I WALKED OUT THE DOOR, HE CALLED, "IF I GO TO WASHINGTON, I WILL WANT TO BE JOINED BY MY DEFENSE EXPERTS".

7. FINAL WORD: I VERY CAREFULLY USED WORD "MAY" WHEN TELLING SHAIKH KHALIFA ABOUT POSSIBILITY THAT HE BE CONTACTED DURING HIS TRAVELS. I THINK IT SAFE TO ASSUME, HOWEVER, THAT HE HEARD "WILL". IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE PASS SOME WORD TO HIM DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, EVEN IF THAT WORD IS NEGATIVE REGARDING HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON.
BURLEIGH

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